

CELIA HUNTER, "WRAP-UP" SPEECH AT THE
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ARTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

My talk is to be on the present and the future of Alaska's wilderness heritage. I think to begin; I would like just to comment on the Alaska that I knew when I first came up here. Jenny Wood and I delivered a couple of airplanes to Fairbanks, Alaska on January 1, 1947. I wonder if you realize that it was exactly thirty-five years ago, this coming January, that we landed in Fairbanks, Alaska? One of the first things that we did after we arrived here, was to take a job with Gene Jack, to fly a load of cargo from Fairbanks, out to Kotzebue during the course of which we got weathered in Galena for eighteen days when it was sixty-six below zero. In the course of that flight, I think it became very, very obvious how much there is to Alaska. We flew for hours and hours and hours in that small, single engine plane without seeing anything; except once in a while a cabin along a river. Once I remember, when we were getting close to Selawik, we looked down, and we saw a coffin sitting out in the middle of the barren tundra. It was just one of those weird things that just stick in your mind because it was such an anachronism, such a jolt to look down and realize that this land *did* have people in it. They lived here, and they died here, and that this land was a land that supported people. Much as in the Middle West, and all of the areas that we were so much more used to flying over within the lower forty-eight where you had a farm house every time you turned around. You just had these patterns of endless cross sections of roads as you flew over Iowa and Kansas in the big Middle West. But I think that that seamless ness of Alaska was something that we didn't appreciate enough then. In 1947 the proprietary interests in Alaska were very few. I suppose 99.5% of Alaska was still owned by the Federal government, which had drawn a few random lines on the map around relatively small areas defining parks, defining some Wildlife Refuges and that sort of thing. Actual land, in private ownership was miniscule. Today, after having gone through the three major acts of Alaska's career; the Statehood Act, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, and finally, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, that seamless ness of Alaska is forever gone. We have a land that is divided. It is divided by road corridors. The railroad corridors still exist. We have endless proliferations of private in-holdings. Private lands and the public lands have been divided up among just a horrendous number of agencies; both as the State government had taken lands, and the Federal government. We have seen the major divisions between the natives and the State of Alaska, and finally the setting aside of areas in the national conservation units. With all of that, Alaska's treasure of wilderness is still out there. It is still far larger than in any other part of the United States. The only thing, as I think about it, and look at it; I have jotted down some thoughts that I do want to convey to you. One of them is that the future of Alaska's wilderness will be assured by a dynamic process. We in the environmental movement must be alert, flexible, and ready to respond to changing circumstances whenever and wherever they occur. We'll have to keep our eyes and our ears open. Our information

channels must be kept open. Our minds must be lively and innovative as we go forward. We have a divided land that we are coping with. The only thing that is going to make it whole again will be the active good will of a concerned and aware and caring public. This is the mission of the environmental movement to reach out to the unconvinced, the uninformed, and the uncomprehending. And to try to inculcate a universal land ethic, which will protect land, both inside and outside of conservation units. We simply cannot hope for the integrity of wilderness if that wilderness is confined within discreet boundaries, surrounded by lands where anything goes if it makes a profit for somebody. Knowing this, we realize that our focus must be on the people in the environmental movement. If this small, devoted band is going to undertake this kind of campaign those people must care for each other. And each person must care for himself or herself. To do this means focusing on human beings, and how they tick. Mardy touched on one aspect of this human need when she reminded us that we, the environmental community, need to remember how to celebrate. And to relax and let go, and to find the occasions when we can simply celebrate, for whatever reason. We have to remember that in her vocabulary, that included dancing. I am sure Jeff will appreciate that. We had a celebration last night, a marvelous happening. It was spontaneous, it was joyful, it was touching, it was moving, it was emotional, it was unifying. No matter what background those attending the event came from, they became united and caught up in the wonderfully inspiring message from Mardy Murie, and in the rewarding and recognition of one of our own for devotion to the environmental community far beyond the call of duty. It was an occasion, which reached deep into the souls of those attending. It was impossible to remain aloof and untouched, and it sent people away determined to continue to work in the movement. And eager to help and expand and to reach out to become involved themselves, in every level of our communities. These highs are vital to keep us going. But beyond these highs are bound to come the lows. When we get back into our own jobs, and are faced by the vast realities of life in this modern world on every level, from personal relationships, and on the job daily ness, to the enormous number of crisis which leap out at us from the pages of our newspapers and magazines, from environmental publications, from radio and television. The hazards and risks of modern life seem out of control and ominous. Constant threats, all the way. From someone trying to subdivide our own backyards, to the worldwide concerns about famine, desertification, terrorism, minor wars, which could blow up into World War three. Sometimes all of these combine into such an overwhelming sense of catastrophe that we are frozen into immobility. Speaking to this feeling, which is a prime cause of personal burnout in all movement people, staff and volunteers alike, I'd like to suggest that there are ways to deal with this kind of stress. We in the environment movement need to factor in such anti-stress measures for ourselves and those we hire. We must give them equal importance with fundraising and issue work. Pick your issues carefully, and start doing something positive in concert with others in small groups, support groups, and networks with the unexpected others who come forth when we start to do our own actions. Beyond this, we need to search for our own spiritual centers. We do this in many ways. There are many avenues, which are available today, for us to do so. I will just name a few. One of

them is meditation, yoga, aikido, ti-chi, the blending of body movements to still our busyness and focus our minds and beings, to get in touch with our real selves. To create a quiet time within our own daily routine, and give that the emphasis it, and we deserve. Following this, and an integral part of this, is to find ways in which we get in touch with the integral processes of nature. For many, this is what we seek in wilderness, this sense of being attuned to timeless and eternal verities. So much of what goes on in the world, which is reported by our all seeing and all hearing media is in reality the stormy surface of the ocean. Below in the depths, life proceeds undisturbed by all of that “foofarah” above. When we put ourselves in touch with these eternal and irresistible forces, which truly govern our planet, and indeed, our whole universe, we quiet our souls. We quiet our minds and our beings. And we find that perspective on the world around us, which enables us to move and act in those places where we can be effective, and can permit others to care for the things beyond our reach. Native peoples have long recognized this in their rituals. Perhaps we need to find rituals of our own which can serve as doors into this sense of order and eternity. In the world today, science and the search for spiritual truth are converging inexorably, and are turning out to be two sides of the same coin. They are linked insolubly to everything else in the universe. Our human need to chop things up into bite-sized pieces circumvents this wholeness, which is the reality of our world. Change is the only unchanging variable in this world of ours. The capacity of each of us to change ourselves, and by changing ourselves, to effect far reaching in the world around us, is the most important thing we should carry away from here. Thank you, and God bless you. [Applause]